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~~Top Secret~~

19 NOVEMBER 1981

USSR: TOXIN RESEARCH BY GENETICIST MAY BE
BW RELATED

We believe that aflatoxin research by geneticist represents application of genetic engineering techniques to a potential biological warfare agent. Such technology could be used to optimize an agent's toxic properties and/or produce militarily significant amounts of it.

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Aflatoxins are toxic metabolites produced by some strains of the fungus Aspergillus flavus. They are acutely toxic, most commonly producing direct liver damage, and they are powerful carcinogens. They also are widespread natural contaminants of the food chain. Thus, contamination of food supplies or crops could be used in a covert combat role to sicken or demoralize troops or civilians, and could appear to be a natural phenomenon. An East German military manual entitled Chemical Warfare Agents and Protection Against CW Agents, published in 1977, discusses aflatoxin in the context of just such a potential sabotage agent role.

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